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Time Arts

Video

Chicago

Visual Narratives: New Chicago Video

Center for New Television and Randolph Street Gallery

[the show was at CNT but sponsored by both, and one piece  
was at RSG as an installation before and after the show]

February 12-13, 1987

by Chuck Kleinhans

Exhibition problems interfered with the ten new videos curated by Jeanine Mellinger. A very large turnout crowded the awkward exhibition space both nights. Poorly adjusted monitors and other technical problems irritated the audience as well as the artists present. An intelligent and well-informed introduction by Neil Seiling seemed long and academic to many of the friends of the artists attending the first night, and a transfer of his live presentation to image-processed video on the second night did not significantly help the situation. Given this framing, the videos themselves suffered, and rather than a pleasant sampler, the show turned into a frustrating anthology.

This is a shame because individually some of the works were accomplished, notable, and aesthetically intriguing. The concept of the exhibition seemed to be to show that Chicago video, which has a national reputation for heavily manipulated imagery (especially as done with or inspired by the Sandin image processor), has reached a new stage of complexity. This is important to note for Chicago work is often ignored elsewhere because people are unfamiliar with the dense electronic manipulation typical of image processing. Many claim past Chicago work exhibits technical and visual complexity at the expense of having something to say.

Mellinger's motivation, announcing a new phase and overturning the old commonplaces about Windy City video,

was fine, but grouping the works under the fashionable and vague term "narrative" served neither audience nor artists. The strongest works such as Ed Rankus' *She Heard Voices* (1986, 10 min.) and Annette Barbier's *Forced Perspective* (1986, 3 min.) were better thought of as explorations of conscious/unconscious processes, dream and desire mixed with memory. Barbier's intense collapsing of different places and moments through editing and split screen compells subjective viewing. A fisheye exploration of an apartment moves into shots suggesting danger, perhaps medical emergency, without direct statement. In its density and richness, the tape reveals Barbier as an immensely accomplished artist. Rankus' neo-Dada juxtaposition of beautifully evocative false landscapes and interior views with a Max Ernst text comes off as intriguing and witty.

*Exploded Views Series* (1985-86, 7 min.) by Arturo Cubacub energetically mixes dance with video and computer graphic abstraction and elaboration. His refreshing freewheeling looseness contrasted with the unimaginative flatness of other tapes such as Kevin Huotari's *Mystery and Intrigue* (1986, 3 min.) and Sasha Summer's *Not the Desecration of In No Sense* (1987, 5 min) and Karla Berry's *Love Makes Shadows of Us All* (1986, 10 min.).

In a different situation these tapes and the others might be more memorable, but given the physical discomfort of crowding, a long show, and a certain postmod triteness (if that isn't an oxymoron) in much of the work, it's hard to say that the show demonstrated much aesthetic distinction in Chicago video in the mid-80s. Different, yes. Better? We'll have to see more.

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